



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE NEW PATH.

VOL. II.]

SEPTEMBER, 1865.

[No. 9.]

## A YARN BY AN OLD SALT.

In a late number of the *NEW PATH* a writer remarks, "I often think when I am looking at pictures and statues, indeed I cannot separate the notion from other elements of judgment, how do these things stand in relation to our common humanity?"

The question is pertinent, and deserving of attention, but the author alluded to has by no means exhausted the subject; there are many things yet to be considered, the first in importance appearing to be the bearing of form, outline and projection, in the geometrical sense, on the human mind. Artists too generally ignore, or at least slight the study of form for that of color. Now an artist cannot know color too well, but may know form too indefinitely. Color is beautiful, but it is transient, varying with every change of relative position of object and light; this variation often increases the beauty of the object, but is beyond the reach of most artists. Of the common senses, color appeals to the sight alone. Form is beautiful, form is comparatively unchangeable; form is perceptible to both sight and touch, and, therefore, is of first importance, by the difference in the satisfaction of merely seeing, and of both seeing and handling a thing, as seen in those who are said to "carry their eyes at their fingers' ends." There are various kinds and degrees of "color blindness;" but he is more than "color blind," who is deceived in the outlines of black and white, and it were a queer case when one's touch deceived him in the form of

a thing at rest; square is square, and round is round to all. Why then should "form" be left so entirely to the sculptors and the blind, both of whom are so limited in their choice of subjects, that even in bas-relief—a style of work of less repute and poorer results than it should be—many things are beyond the sculptor's reach? Why then should the painter so entirely ignore form? for of so little importance is it deemed by them, that a professed critic gravely assured a young artist that, "a knowledge of geometrically true perspective, beyond what he could acquire in one day, would be perfectly useless to him as an artist, and he advised him not to waste his time on it." The doctrine, that any possible amount of knowledge of his subject could be utterly useless to an artist, sounds very like a jesuitical desire to keep him ignorant, or else comes from the habitual weariness of one who cares not to study. On the contrary, any increase whatsoever of the artist's knowledge of his subject must increase his confidence, and improve the quality of his work. Did any artist in the late exhibitions show a surplus of knowledge of perspective? If so, read him out of the profession at once as a stranger, for such he must be in this world.

Did not these same exhibitions rather show a low, a miserably low average of knowledge on that point? It is common to hear painters say, "What a beautiful color," or "What a perfect chord of color;" but who ever hears them remark a beauty of form or out-

line, unless indeed it be that of a woman, which it happens to be fashionable to profess rather than possess a knowledge of. An artist painted on the spot a sketch of a portion of the coast, and sent it some hundreds of miles to a boatman who had formerly "run" there. It was returned as fairly colored, but the outline condemned, and a pencil sketch from memory sent to illustrate the criticism; the artist took the sketch to the same point of view to compare with his own and with nature, and acknowledged himself corrected. In this case the boatman showed only a very ordinary amount of knowledge of the make of the land; the outline of earth against sky, which is different in some slight degree in form or elevation from every different position, and the knowledge of which differences is often, in the dark night when the line of earth and water is invisible, and that of earth and sky nearly so, the coaster's only guide, and one to which he trusts his life, his reputation, with such an almost unconscious degree of certainty that—his vessel being by long usage as it were a part of himself—he says, and almost thinks, that his sloop "knows the way between her accustomed ports, and would go of herself, if her sails were hoisted and the lines let go."

The human mind is more reflective than a mirror. As the "jodle" of Norway, Switzerland and Tyrol repeats the echoes of their mountain gorges; as the Irish "lyke wake" swells and sighs like the wind over the lonely peat bog; as the "melody" of the Scottish Border sounds of much human life, in a country of more mist than sunshine; as the Highland "strathspey" has the change of the mountain torrent borne on the fitful gale; as the Spanish music seldom loses sight of the sierra, and the lone moors of La Mancha, though well mingled with the voice of trees in great number; as Italian airs echo the light zephyr and the "*dolce far niente*" of

the land of myrtles and olives, so designs in form and color must reflect the scenes of their birth, as is seen in the art wherein America excels—in shipbuilding. For the ships of different nations show the nature of their native seas. Thus in America, the long sweep of the Atlantic wave, deep water, open to the steady wind, and with comparatively little current, is reflected in the sheer of the clipper from ship to sloop; in the Chesapeake and Southern sounds, shoal water and much calm straightens the line, as shown in the schooners of that region; in the West Indies shoal water and much calm, make smooth water in spite of strong currents, till the "long low" is proverbial of the "Gulf." In Europe, the German ocean has strong currents interwoven with shoals and gales, and true is the reflection of its short, crooked waves in the Dutch galliot, the English "billy boy," the "geordie brig;" indeed, the change from there to Cape Finisterre, whether in the short chop sea of continual turmoil, or in the build of the French lugger and English yacht, is hardly describable in words not scientific, but "sheer" and wave agree. Go up the Mediterranean; deep water, little current, and much calm, the sea short at times, often flat, some long sweeps, never so large as the Atlantic swell, but much like it in form, and Spanish, French and Italian—the ships of Trieste are almost American in appearance—show well the nature of their seas; the gondola of Venice lies as long and flat in its curves as the lagoon on which it floats.\*

\* Curious, that there should be in an obscure village on the American coast, a pattern of skiff characteristic of the place, and also identical in form, size, curve, and manner of building, with the most common of the cheaper patterns used by the fruit and flower venders of Venice; but, the American rows in common style with two oars, the Venetian, as in the gondola, prefers one; there is doubtless some of the same race in both places, but some of this coincidence of fancy may be laid to resemblance of the waters, certainly none of it to communication between the places.

The Caravelli, Feluccas, and Grecian craft, with as much "sheer" as a Dutch galliot, contrast their parabolic, pure, cold curves, with the elliptic, warm, sensual curves of the North, just as sea contrasts with sea; the rule will apply to the canoe of the South Seas, to the Norwegian "froam," to the junk of China, and the steamboat of the Mississippi, which contrasts its warm, sensual, elliptic "sheer" with the cold, pure, parabolic line of the North river or "Sound" boat, exactly as the short eddying wave of the muddy, whirling, tangled, and headstrong stream contrasts with the pure, steady, quiet, and regular waters of the Eastern bays and rivers. In these studies the proper criterion is the coasting craft, that seldom leaves its native seas; it is characteristic, while those that "go foreign," and sail on "blue water," of course assimilate thereto in a greater or less degree, according to how near the national character is to the generic type of deep water, little current, steady winds, &c. America coming the nearest to this on her coast, of course comes the nearest to it in her "sheer lines." Brazil, Ohili, and the Hawaiian Islands, should do as well naturally—perhaps do, but not doing so much, their efforts are lost sight of in the shadow of the United States. Europe never will, let her imitate as she may; her character must remain that of the waters around her. Australia should do well, and probably will, when they build and show us. Russia may show more beauty at the mouth of the Amoor than at Cronstadt or Odessa; if Southern Africa would build, the Kafir might beat the Englishman for beauty.

But the rule applies everywhere; observe the wheelwrights; the curves of their carriage-patterns differ from those of ships in just the same manner and degree that the warm curves of the form of a horse differ from the curves

of the sea; sometimes, perhaps, modified also by the make of the land, and other local causes. It is curious to see that the European, disliking to change his own work, and having unwittingly built his coach in style to agree with his horse, should, when building an iron road and horse of essentially straight and level lines, put and keep the same old pattern of coach on it, however clumsy and inconvenient; while the American, having no objection to changing a pattern that he did not originate, for one of his own design, easily perceives the fitness and beauty of straight lines in his cars. Nor yet was this change made by him without fair trial and condemnation of the old patterns, for the writer of this rode in horse-cars in Philadelphia (on the Columbia road), that bore a great resemblance to a huge stage coach, nearly thirty years ago, and has heard a tradition of the elders, that all of the first railroads started the old-country pattern of cars. But the car-builders, in dropping European rules, and putting up a car fitted to their roads, have set a splendid example to the artist, who would do well to drop the "veiling vapors" an American rarely if ever sees, and leave them to their native place, the "chops of the channel." "Good American weather," as the sailors call it, is better worthy their attention. It is a pity some American painter should not visit the "Sargasso sea:" it is noted among the severest of judges, the sailors, for beauty of sky. This matter of "veiling vapor" was a make-shift adopted with joy by the European, who found therein an excuse for imperfect form, outline, and perspective, and it covers far more ignorance and bad work than all its beauties, even in the Biscay, will compensate for; it is not natural in America, nor can work depending upon it ever be, or deserve to be, either popular or great

here. The smoky haze of Italy is not so bad; there is here, especially in June, a very near approach to it in the same semiopaque dryness of the air, but beware of putting it on a winter scene. An American December morning gives the landscape a sharper outline, more distinct and clear, than inhabitants of England ever saw there—the engraver can scarcely equal it; but some approach to it is necessary before the American mind can feel to say, "Well done," and to give it requires the deepest knowledge of perspective and form that the artist is capable of; until this is done, the cheap lithograph, of harsh, but tolerably correct line, of color crude and staring, but of air clear, and objects distinct, will—and that properly—out-rank the paint and canvas of the "European Ape," an animal unluckily not confined to the Rock of Gibraltar.

In figure painting, no European education is necessary; there are in America all the various European models, and that in beauty of development that would delight Angelo or Lavater; and here also is the advantage of having them conveniently assorted, there being often in one small village more different races than are to be found in large cities in the Old countries, where intercourse and change of locality is so much restricted. The costumes of the different races in America are not so varied as in Europe; true, but, for an American public, must be painted American costumes, good or bad, and even here, as in the ships and rail-cars, fashion has outrun the artist, and American costumes fit the country, and are more beautiful in connection with American scenes than the imported ones. In this, as in the ships, there is a common ground for nations of much intercourse; but examine the poorer classes, who travel less, and is the Belgian's wooden shoe, at the Castle Garden, in point of beauty superior to

the fireman's boot when the City Hall bell strikes? Compare, not for beauty of fitness only, but look at the fireman's boot in good position, that is, "high action," and the reader may choose his own time for looking at the wooden shoe in this country. If the artist wishes to describe foreigners let him travel, his work shall have the value of a traveller's tale; but if he would paint history let him stay at home and paint the portraits of his acquaintances. Let him not search out the oldest building in the city and think that he is painting a characteristic of New York; rather let him paint the most common, the most "New Yorky" front seen from his own window, and his work shall have the value of a true record of his period.

To paint a picture to sell, requires that it should please the mind of the purchaser in one of two things, it must have an interesting subject, or skilful rendering; to be great, it must have both; but how can an artist hope to either select an interesting subject or to paint the subject chosen skilfully, who spends more time in studying how to "wine and dine" some patron into giving him a commission, than in studying how to fill such commission when obtained. It is as dangerous to wink at a painter as at a mock auctioneer, unless one wants a bushel of worthlessness sent around next day with "that little bill." The artist says he must live; perhaps so—opinions differ; but if by his pencil, let him color photographs, or draw on stone (lithographic artists are generally at a premium), or do any regular journey-work, with regular pay; then his mind may settle to its study and bring forth fruit; for he who works ten hours per day, knowing that he will be paid, however little, is independent of patronage, and may defy the critic, and can give his mind to the subject that delights him.

(*To be continued.*)